

# Journey of Faith



## In Short:



- Jesus invites you to the Church.
- The RCIA is a time to ask questions.
- The RCIA process has four periods.

Feelings can be powerful, but you wouldn't want a relationship founded only on feelings. Relationships are stronger and healthier when they're built on solid ground. We trust and respect decisions that are well-considered, shared, and entered into freely.

## Welcome to the RCIA

There are many people searching for a way to meet their spiritual needs and identify with a community of faith. People who feel the desire to know more about the Catholic Church and to explore its life may simply need a friendly invitation. Perhaps your spouse or a close friend is Catholic, or you saw or read something that prompted questions and inspired interest. The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults is the Church's way of extending an invitation.

### Take Your Time

No need to rush; it makes sense to go at your own pace and move thoughtfully through the biggest decisions of our lives. People rarely get married, buy a house, change careers, or move cities without giving such significant decisions appropriate time and consideration. Our initial interest leads to further exploration, helping us get to know our options and ourselves better. You might have felt this tug at your soul before and have only now chosen to act upon it.

Our Catholic faith isn't so much a set of beliefs, although we do have them, but more of a relationship that starts with our Lord and develops as we observe and encounter him in our lives.

- *How do you make big decisions?*
- *Why are you interested in learning more about the Catholic Church?*



## What Does the RCIA Mean?

The RCIA stands for the **Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults**. It's the process through which unbaptized adults and older children are formed in the teachings and practices of Catholicism and are *initiated* into the Catholic Church. It's marked by various **rites** or rituals, which usually occur at Sunday Mass. Sometimes the process includes baptized adult Christians or Catholics who are preparing to receive the sacraments of confirmation and Eucharist.

## Why Do Catholics Initiate Others Into Their Faith?

Jesus told his followers to "make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). No other ancient religion sought converts: not Egyptians, Greeks, or Romans. But Christians—not just Catholics—still welcome and invite anyone to join us.

This is because we believe that:

- Following Jesus makes people happier and more at peace, both here and in the life to come. We believe the Catholic Church has the fullest and most authentic understanding of Jesus.
- The Christian community is strengthened by the conversion of all people, who are created in God's likeness and called to discipleship.

*"I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly."*

John 10:10

*"I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete."*

John 15:11

## Jesus Says, "Come!"

Jesus doesn't just want us to follow him into the faith blindly. He wants us to make the choice freely and with all the information we need to make a decision.

- "Come, and you will see" (John 1:39). Jesus invites people to observe him to see if he accomplishes what he says. You will study Jesus closely in the RCIA.
- "Come after me" (Matthew 4:19). These are some of the first words Jesus spoke during his ministry. He didn't say, "Understand me" or, "Obey me." He allowed people to consider his ways and to freely make up their minds.
- "Come, follow me" (Mark 10:21; Luke 18:22). "Follow me" is perhaps the simplest definition of our faith. The RCIA is like a winding road: hard to see far down, but revealed as you go. Fortunately, Jesus leads the way.

## What Happens in the RCIA?

Most processes are a series of weekly sessions with a team of **catechists** (religion teachers), sponsors, and fellow participants. Each session is a safe place to discuss the faith and explore questions about Catholicism or religion and spirituality in general. All questions are welcome and honored.

God invited Mary to be the mother of Jesus because Jesus couldn't be born without her free and informed consent. Before giving her consent, Mary asked "How can this be?" (Luke 1:34). Like Mary, we all have free will to accept Jesus into our lives and to ask our questions. That's how much God respects—and even expects—your honest questions.

## Is the RCIA New?

This process began in the earliest years of the Church. In those first centuries, it was a challenge to convert to Christianity because the Roman Empire often persecuted those who didn't follow its pagan religion. The Church wanted to make sure that candidates really knew what they were doing and were willing to stand up for their faith in a hostile environment. In the 1960s, the Church called for a return to this early model in order to provide Christian formation in the same gradual way people experience and enter any lasting and loving relationship.

- *What questions do you have today?*



## How Long Does the RCIA Last?

It depends. People come with their own unique stories and needs. While many classes begin in late summer or early fall and end at Pentecost, some schedules will vary or run year-round, allowing you to proceed at your own pace.

Understanding faith is as important as having faith, and that takes time. Come with an open heart and an open mind. Get to know as much as you can. Each week, you'll be invited to reflect on Christ's words and deeds and witness or even practice some Catholic behaviors to see if you feel called to this life.

## The Periods of the RCIA

1. **Inquiry** (*Evangelization and Precatechumenate*): During this period, anyone can test the waters and ask questions about the Catholic faith. No commitments or promises are made. This period can last as long as you desire—a few months up to a few years.
2. **Catechumenate**: This word comes from ancient Greek, the language of the early Church. Catechumen means "a person receiving instruction." During this period, you will study and discuss most of the Church's main beliefs. You will also have a **godparent** or **sponsor** join you on your journey. This person can be a Catholic family member, a wise and good friend, or someone from the parish suggested by the team. Your sponsor should attend the RCIA sessions with you regularly and continue conversations with you outside the RCIA. They also serve as your representative and advocate to the Church.
3. **Purification and Enlightenment** (*Lent*): This period occurs during the weeks before Easter and may include any of several optional rites. This time is more prayerful than instructional. It is a time of deeper spiritual preparation for the sacraments. Then, on the night before Easter, during the Vigil Mass on Holy Saturday, those who have completed their preparation enter the Church through the **sacraments of initiation**: baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist.
4. **Mystagogy** (*Postbaptismal Catechesis*): This final period usually lasts several weeks—from Easter to Pentecost. It's a time to reflect on the mysteries of the sacraments and to begin living out your new faith in practical ways.

## Why Should I Attend Mass and Participate in Parish Events?

The Church celebrates the Mass because Jesus invites us to "do this in memory of me" (Luke 22:19). In worship, prayer, and holy Communion, Catholics are united with God and each other. That togetherness also reveals the Lord: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20).

While we can—and should—pray and study alone, God wants us to experience his love as part of a community. Faith is both private and public, and—as in any loving relationship—God doesn't want you to walk alone or keep your feelings to yourself. Publicly expressing and receiving love together makes it stronger, more real, and inspires others. So when the parish sees and hears your journey—and you witness members' ongoing and growing faith—you strengthen each other along the way.

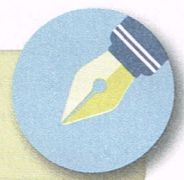
- Name a Catholic you admire. What do you admire about him or her?



### How Do I Start?

- **Be openhearted:** Come eager to learn.
- **Ask questions:** Be ready to address and explore your concerns.
- **Talk to wise mentors:** Let your understanding grow as you discuss ideas with trusted friends.
- **Pray for wisdom:** Ask Jesus for what you need to follow him.
- **Read the *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)*:** A **catechism** is a summary of religious teachings for the purpose of instruction. Consider this a great asset for your journey.
- **Keep a journal:** Let it be a place to record and respond to questions or comments and to reflect on your journey and growth in writing and prayer.

Write three facts about yourself on a slip of paper. Place them in a pile with all the others. As your leader reads each one, guess who the fact belongs to.



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